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ABSTRACT

Use of a mediator to facilitate voluntary agreements between disputants is becoming a widely used method of conflict resolution in a variety of contexts. This study simulated a dispute to examine the influence of mediator and negotiator gender on mediator behavior. Male (N=94) and female (N=94) college students mediated a computer-simulated dispute between either two males, two females, or a male/female pair. The results revealed a gender difference in the type of messages the mediators sent to those designated as bargainers. Compared to females, males were more confident in their ability to mediate and felt that their recommendations had greater influence on negotiators. It was more important to females that the negotiators approve of their recommendations. Males used coercive pressing and compensating tactics more than did females; females used integrating tactics and were more inactive than were males. Mediators were more likely to use coercive pressing and compensating tactics with opposite gender negotiation pairs than with same gender pairs. No gender related effects were found for the quality of mediators' proposals. (Author/NB)

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Gender Differences in Mediator Behavior

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Gender Differences in Mediator Behavior

Abstract

This study simulated a dispute to examine the influence of mediator and negotiator gender on mediator behavior. Male and female subjects mediated a dispute between two males, two females, or a male/female pair. Males were more confident in their ability to mediate and felt that their recommendations had greater influence on negotiators than females. It was more important to females that the negotiators approve of their recommendations. Males used coercive pressing and compensating tactics more than females; females used integrating tactics and were more inactive than males. Mediators were more likely to use coercive pressing and compensating tactics with opposite gender negotiation pairs than with same gender pairs. No gender related effects were found for the quality of mediators' proposals.

A mediator is a third party who attempts to facilitate voluntary agreements between two or more disputants; it is becoming a widely used method of conflict resolution in a variety of contexts, including divorce, community, international, and labor-management disputes (Carnevale, 1986; Pruitt & Kressel, 1985; Rubin, 1980). This study addresses a factor in mediation that has not been examined: the effects of gender on mediator behavior. Does mediator gender influence the use of mediator tactics? Does disputant gender influence mediator behavior?

In the bargaining and allocation literatures, females were found to be predominantly cooperative; males were predominantly competitive (Baird, 1976; Ashmore & DelBoca, 1979; Broverman, et al., 1972; Deaux, 1976; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). In one negotiation study, females were less active (making fewer statements) than males, and males made greater use of forceful coercive tactics (Kimmel, et al., 1980). Carnevale (1986) has identified mediator behaviors that are analogous to negotiator behaviors. Mediators can do the following: 1. press, which involves forcing the parties to lower their aspirations; 2. compensate, which involves enticing the parties into agreement with the promise of rewards; 3. integrate, which involves thinking of creative novel solutions; and 4. inaction, which involves letting the disputants handle the controversy on their own. Based on the gender effects in the negotiation literature, the first hypothesis in the present study was that female mediators will use integration and inaction more than male mediators, and male mediators will use forceful pressing and compensating tactics more than female mediators.

Much research concludes that males are more agentic/task-oriented/-instrumental, and females are more communal/maintenance-oriented/socio-emotional (e.g. Watts, et al., 1982; Yamada, et al., 1983; Hall, 1984). This difference suggests that in mediation, males should be more concerned with achievement, prominence, and success, whereas females should be more concerned

with interpersonal relationships, approval, and cooperation. The second hypothesis was that female mediators will show more concern for the negotiators' feelings than will male mediators.

Yamada et al. (1983) report that individuals with little confidence in their knowledge about a situation were conducive to cooperation; confident participants were disposed to compete. Most mediators in business contexts are males (Carnevale & Pegnetter, 1985). These findings, combined with the literature that suggests gender differences in mediator behavior, suggested a third hypothesis: Males will be more confident in their ability to mediate and will perceive themselves as more influential than females.

Prior research suggests that conflicts are more severe between people who are dissimilar on a variety of dimensions, including perceived similarity and group membership (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). Conceivably, mediators will perceive same-gender pairs as less conflictual than opposite gender pairs. In a study of professional labor mediators, Carnevale and Pegnetter (1985) found that mediators were more active and likely to use forceful tactics when hostilities were great. These results suggested a fourth hypothesis: Mediators will be more active and will use more forceful pressing and compensating tactics with opposite gender pairs than with same gender pairs.

METHOD

The subjects were 94 male and 94 female undergraduates. Each subject sat in front of an IBM Personal Computer and was assigned to the role of "Product Manager" in a simulated dispute between a "New York Manager" and a "Boston Manager." They were told that their task was to "help the managers reach an agreement." The two managers were actually computer programs.

Gender of the negotiators was operationalized by the name that appeared on the computer screen; when both negotiators were male, for example, the screen indicated that the New York Manager's name was "Tom" and the Boston Manager's

name was "George." Several male and female names were used (e.g. Thomas, George, Peter, for the males; Jane, Susan, Patricia for the females). The subjects were required to write down the names of the two bargainers in an effort to make their gender more salient.

Approximately one-third of the subjects mediated between two males, one-third between two females, and one-third between a male and a female. A standard integrative bargaining task was employed (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986); the mediators could send recommendations on three issues, as well as messages, to the bargainers.

The negotiation consisted of five rounds; each round involved the New York Manager sending an offer, the Boston Manager sending a counteroffer (both of these were the computer program), and then the subject (mediator) could make a recommendation and send a message. The messages were designed to reflect the mediator strategies described in the Introduction: several represented pressing (e.g. agree or you will get fired), compensating (e.g., agree and you will be promoted), and integrating (e.g., let's find a mutually acceptable solution). After the five rounds, the subjects were given a questionnaire and debriefed.

RESULTS

In support of the first hypothesis, a gender difference was found in the type of messages the mediators sent to those designated as bargainers (Table 1; all effects $p<.05$ unless stated otherwise). Pressing and compensating messages were used significantly more by males than by females. In addition, male mediators sent a greater number of messages to the bargainers than female mediators. Females were significantly more inactive. Integrating messages were sent more often by females than males, although this finding was only marginally significant ($p<.15$).

It was more important to the female mediators that the bargainers approve

of their recommendations, and that the bargainers achieve an outcome they feel is good, in support of the second hypothesis.

The third hypothesis that male mediators would be more confident than female mediators was supported. As can be seen in Table 1, males were more confident than females. They also felt their recommendations had a greater influence on bargainers than female mediators.

In support of the fourth hypothesis, mediators were more likely to use pressing ($p<.06$) and compensating messages, and overall were more active, with opposite gender pairs than same gender pairs (see Table 2). No significant differences were found for the mediators' proposals sent to the bargainers nor were there any interactions between mediator and bargainer gender.

DISCUSSION

The main finding from the present study is that mediator gender does influence mediator behavior. Male mediators were more forceful, more confident, and believed that their efforts were more influential than female mediators. Females were more concerned with the approval of the bargainers and sent fewer messages.

This study is the first to examine gender differences in mediator behavior. It suggests that male and female mediator style is different, and that this may be an important factor to consider in mediator selection. If a less forceful, integrative style of mediation is desired, a female mediator may be the best choice; if a forceful style is desired, a male mediator may be the better choice. The selection of mediators by characteristics, such as gender, may be important in the settlement of disputes.

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Table 1

MEDIATOR GENDER DIFFERENCES

Variable	Mediator Gender	
	Female	Male
Messages:		
Pressing	.20	.30
Compensating	.05	.10
Integrating ($p<.15$)	.30	.25
Inaction	1.20	.75
# of Messages Sent	3.81	4.24
Questionnaire:		
Confidence in ability	2.70	3.16
Influential recommendations	2.16	2.40
Bargainers approve of recommendations	9.32	8.60
Bargainers achieve good outcome	9.65	8.97

Table 2

BARGAINER GENDER DIFFERENCES

Variable	Bargainer Gender		
	Male/Male	Female/Male	Female/Female
Messages:			
Pressing	.20	.30	.20
Compensating	.05	.10	.05
Integrating (ns)	.25	.30	.30
Inaction	1.15	.65	1.20
# of Messages Sent	3.83	4.36	3.81